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NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

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ART. I.—1. *Narrative of Discoveries on the North Coast of America, effected by the Officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, during the Years 1836–39.* By THOMAS SIMPSON, Esq. London. 1843. 8vo.

2. *Voyages of Discovery and Research within the Arctic Regions, from the Year 1818, in Search of the Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with two Attempts to reach the North Pole; abridged from the Official Narratives.* By SIR JOHN BARROW. London. 1846.

THE existence of a navigable passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, along the northern shore of North America, has been taken for granted ever since the discovery of the continent. But geographers have been sorely puzzled in their attempts to determine its position. The earlier map-makers, being very slightly hampered with any knowledge of that part of the world, seem to have felt at liberty to draw what their fancy suggested. Gemma Frisius represents the whole of North America as only a long, narrow strip of land jutting out from the continent; while others, more hardy, not only cover the circumpolar region with well defined islands and broad straits, but mark the pole itself with a large mountain, which they describe as being of black rock. Nor have the many expeditions, which have so industriously sought for the Northwest Passage, fixed the maps yet. Not one has returned without changing what had before

been considered as well determined, or without adding new discoveries. *Terra Corteralis*, named from its discoverer, the adventurous Cortereal, was at first put in a high northern latitude. In later maps, it was gradually pushed farther south, until at last it disappeared. Frobisher's Strait was for a long time drawn as running through Greenland, and maps still differ in delineating it. Baffin's Bay, after being represented for a time with tolerable correctness, was, by later improvements, considerably changed in its shape, size, and position, till its existence came to be doubted. On some maps it was entirely blotted out, until later discoveries restored it to its old position. So late as last year, Mr. Rae discovered that there is solid land where Dease and Simpson thought they had discovered a strait, and where Ross had previously marked land, in accordance with the representations of the Esquimaux. How accurate the maps are now, it is impossible to tell ; but judging from the past, we have every reason to suppose that they are not free from error. Indeed, we are confident, that the expeditions which have been sent out by the English government to succor Sir John Franklin will not leave them unaltered. These expeditions, forming a gigantic apparatus of discovery that stretches from ocean to ocean, will undoubtedly add much to what is already known of arctic geography ; but we certainly do not expect that they will find a navigable Northwest Passage, nor do we believe that they will ascertain the whole of the northern boundary of the continent.

A late number of *Fraser's Magazine*, in an article which was evidently written with an official sanction, publishes the instructions of the Admiralty to Sir John Franklin, and to the officers who have been sent to his relief, from which we gather the aim of the expeditions. Franklin left England on the 26th of May, 1845, in two ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, and was heard of, the last time, on the 26th of July of the same year. His instructions were full and explicit. After directing him to penetrate through Barrow's Strait, they continue as follows :—

“ In proceeding to the westward, you will not stop to examine any of the openings either to the northward or southward in that Strait, but continue to push to the westward without loss of time, in the latitude of about $74\frac{1}{4}$ °, until you have reached the longi-

tude of that portion of the land on which Cape Walker is situated, or about 98° west. From that point, we desire that every effort be used to penetrate to the southward and west, in a course as direct towards Behring's Strait as the position and extent of the ice, and the existence of land at present unknown, may admit."

"We direct you to this particular part of the Polar Sea as affording the best prospect of accomplishing the passage to the Pacific, in consequence of the unusual magnitude and apparently fixed state of the barrier of ice, observed by the *Hecla* and *Griper* in the year 1820, off Cape Dundas, the southwestern extremity of Melville Island. If it should appear that in the direction before ordered you should be arrested by ice of a permanent appearance, and that when passing the mouth of the strait between Devon and Cornwallis Islands, you had observed that it was open and clear of ice, we desire that you will duly consider, with reference to the time already consumed, as well as to the symptoms of a late or early close of the season, whether that channel might not offer a more practicable outlet from the archipelago, and a more ready access to the open sea, where there would be neither islands nor banks to arrest and fix the floating masses of ice."

A paragraph is added, giving very wide discretion. Then the instructions continue: —

"Lancaster Sound and its continuation through Barrow's Strait, having been four times navigated without impediment by Sir Edward Parry, and since, frequently, by whaling ships, without any impediment from ice or islands; and Sir Edward Parry having also proceeded from the latter in a straight course to Melville Island, and returned without experiencing any, or very little difficulty, it is hoped that the remaining portion of the passage, about nine hundred miles, to Behring's Strait, may also be found equally free from obstruction."

Of the three expeditions which have been sent to rescue him, if he can be found alive, Sir James Ross has command of the one which has gone to Barrow's Strait. One of his two vessels is charged particularly with the task of examining the coast to the west of Prince Regent's Inlet. It was to spend the past winter in some safe harbor, while parties on foot were to carry on explorations still farther to the south and southwest. Farther instructions will be sent to it in the coming summer. The other vessel is to go to Winter harbor in Melville Island, or, if practicable, to Banks's Land, there to form a centre of operations from which exploring

parties are to be sent in every useful direction. "One party is then to pursue the coast in whatever direction it may seem likely to have been followed by Sir John Franklin; and thus determine the general shape of the western face of Banks's Land. It is then to proceed directly to Cape Bathurst or Cape Parry, on the Main Land; at each of which places, Sir John Richardson is directed to leave provisions for its use. It will then advance to Fort Good Hope, where it will find directions to return to England by the usual route of the traders. Another party will explore the east coast of Banks's Land, and from thence proceed to Cape Krusenstern, and there join the party under the command of Sir John Richardson." To these instructions the Admiralty add, "If Providence should not be pleased to crown your efforts with success, we leave it to your own judgment, when and from whence to return to England, as soon as you are convinced that every means within your reach has been exhausted."

Sir John Richardson, accompanied by Mr. Rae, whose interesting discoveries were published last summer, has charge of the overland expedition. He expected to reach the mouth of the Mackenzie river by the 7th of last August. Thence he was to proceed in four strong, light boats along the coast to the east, as far as the Coppermine river; then to explore the south and west sides of Wollaston Land. If he should think fit to continue the search another summer, (1849,) he is then to examine the passages between Wollaston and Banks and Victoria Lands. His search is ordered to cease after the winter of 1849; he is then to take steps to return to England at the earliest practicable moment in the spring of 1850.

A third expedition, comprising two ships, has been sent to Behring's Strait. One ship is to act merely as a tender, and withdraw to a warmer climate on the approach of winter. Commander Moore was to winter with the other in some convenient harbor, as near as may be to Point Barrow, and to send forward a boat party around this point, towards the mouth of the Mackenzie river, to communicate, if possible, with Sir John Richardson. Boat expeditions are again to be sent, in the spring of 1849, to communicate with Sir John. In July, 1849, he will determine whether, under the circumstances, he will continue the search another winter.

The writer of the same article adds, "We may, however,

state, that it is the opinion of eminent arctic voyagers, that, until the autumn of 1849, no apprehensions need exist respecting the fate of the party [Franklin's] from starvation. In a letter from Sir James Ross to Sir Edward Parry, written in the course of last year, Sir James says, alluding to Franklin and Crozier, "Their last letters to me from Whalefish islands, the day previous to their departure from them, inform me that they had taken on board provisions for three years on full allowance, which they could extend to four years without any serious inconvenience; so that we may feel assured, that they cannot want from that cause till after the middle of July, 1849." If, indeed, they be alive, and human means can restore them to their homes, they will surely be ere long in England, telling and listening to the wondrous history of the past four years. Nor ought we to be much surprised, under the circumstances, if Franklin should return, when we remember that Sir John Ross spent three winters amid the ice, with the resources of an expedition fitted out at the expense of a single individual, Sir Felix Booth; and, after the loss of his vessel, forced his way in row boats to the common whaling grounds. Dismissing for the present our fears for his safety, we turn to a consideration of the enterprise in which he is engaged, the discovery of a Northwest Passage.

When Sir John Franklin passed through Barrow's Strait, four possible passages to the Polar Sea presented themselves: one to the south, through Prince Regent's Inlet, into the Gulf of Boothia, thence through Dease and Simpson's Strait into the sea; another to the southwest, through the unexplored region lying between Prince Regent's Inlet and Banks's Land; a third, to the west, through the strait between Banks's Land and Melville island; and a fourth to the north, through the straits which lie between the North Georgian islands, as Parry named them, though they are now appropriately called the Parry islands. Since the recent discoveries of Mr. Rae have shown that there is solid land where Dease and Simpson's Strait was supposed to be, we know now, that the first of these routes is impossible. Of the second, we know nothing but what we learn from Sir Edward Parry. But as both the summers when he looked for an opening there, he found a field of ice of extraordinary thickness, extending

from Prince Regent's Inlet to Banks's Land, presenting an immovable barrier, apparently as firm as the continent, we may safely consider it a hopeless undertaking to look for a navigable passage there. If, therefore, any such passage exist, it must be either between and beyond Melville island and Banks's Land, or else in the channels which lie between the Parry islands.

Parry tried in vain, in the summer of 1819, to push through the first. Having spent the winter of 1819-20 in a harbor in Melville island, he started again for the west in the next summer, as he says, under favorable auspices. The narrow channel of water, between the ice and the land, grew more narrow as he advanced, the floating fragments of ice at times closed entirely around him, and at times forced both his vessels on to the shore. The channel seemed to end at Cape Dundas; and the ice appearing unbroken as far as it could be seen in front, he was obliged to abandon the attempt, after having advanced only sixty miles in a whole season, and that a favorable one. He says, in his *Narrative*, (p. 241,) — “It now became evident, from the combined experience of this and the preceding year, that there was something peculiar about the southwest extremity of Melville island, which made the icy sea there extremely unfavorable to navigation, and which seemed likely to bid defiance to all our efforts to proceed much farther west in that parallel of latitude.” No one, indeed, can read the *Narrative*, without agreeing that there is some peculiarity about the southwestern extremity of Melville island, which presents a permanent obstacle to navigation in that quarter.

But the question naturally arises, What is the nature of this peculiarity, which stagnates and bridges over a strait from fifteen to eighteen leagues wide, connecting two oceans? Is the ice impenetrable by reason of the narrowness or crookedness of the strait? Or is the climate at that particular spot of a peculiar frigidity? Or, in fine, is not Melville island, so called, joined to Banks's Land by lowlands beyond Cape Dundas, making the head of a bay where Parry looked for a strait? In framing an answer, we must depend entirely upon Sir Edward Parry's *Narrative* of his first expedition. His statements of fact are all that we know of the subject; and if they indicate that there is land where he guessed there was

a strait, we, with all respect, prefer his facts to his hypotheses.

In reading the narrative, we are first struck with the increasing difficulty which he found in penetrating the ice as he advanced. Its thickness, its solidity, its firmness, look as if it were left to accumulate and harden in some undisturbed nook, remote from the turbulent ocean. As he went farther west, "the obstructions from ice, both as to its thickness and extent, were found to increase." (pp. 240, 297.) The ice was found to have a greater specific gravity. (p. 247.) Beyond Cape Dundas, it seemed to be so firmly fastened to the land as to be utterly immovable, even in the most violent storms. (pp. 241, 245, 250.) A paragraph in Colonel Sabine's preface to the translation of Von Wrangell's *Siberia and the Polar Sea*, gives a meaning to these facts. He says: —

"The thickness of ice formed in a single season is stated, by Von Wrangell, to be about nine and a half feet; if prevented from drifting away during the summer, a second season will add about five feet, and a third season, doubtless, somewhat more. The fields of ice which have been met with by the British expeditions, in parts of the sea which are known to be cleared every year — in Baffin's Bay and Hudson's Straits, for example, and to the north and west of Spitzbergen — have usually been from nine to ten feet; and I well remember the surprise excited in the expedition which penetrated to Melville island, at the extraordinary and unprecedented thickness of the field ice which they encountered after passing Barrow's Strait and entering, for the first time, the portion of the sea comprised between the continent and the islands to its north; evidencing, on that portion of the sea, that the icy covering remains for successive years. The general thickness was more than double that of the formation of a single year."

The ice had, therefore, been as little disturbed for successive years before Parry's arrival as it was the two years when he strove so perseveringly to find an opening through it. The "something peculiar, unfavorable to navigation" appears then, in the first place, to be, that the ice at the southwestern extremity of Melville island is, from some cause, permanently fixed.

Its immovability is strikingly shown in the effect of different winds upon the floating ice, in the narrow channel in

which Parry was struggling. He says, in his *Narrative*, (p. 242,) "It may always be expected, in icy seas, that a breeze of wind, however slight, will set the ice in motion, if there be any room to move." On another page, we read, "We had been lying near our present situation, with an easterly wind blowing fresh for thirty-six hours together; the ice had not, during the whole of that time, moved a single yard from the shore, affording proof that there was no space in which the ice was at liberty to move to the westward." (p. 241.) On the same day, "the westerly wind cleared us, by slow degrees, of the loose masses of ice floating about the ship, and, in the afternoon, the main body went off about three hundred yards, drifting also a little to the eastward."

At four, A. M., next day, the wind died into a calm. "The ice immediately ceased to drift to the eastward, and, at half past five, a light breeze springing up from the south-east caused it to return in the opposite direction." After ten, P. M., the same day, "the wind blew much harder; the ice had by this time ceased moving westward, having apparently, as before, reached its *ne plus ultra* in that direction." Again, "in the morning watch, a breeze sprung up from the westward, which we were always ready to welcome, having found that it invariably served to open the ice, while an easterly wind as constantly made it closer."

If this is really a strait, joining two large bodies of water, it is in remarkable contrast with all similar straits. The straits which connect Hudson's Bay with the Atlantic are open every summer; Barrow's Strait is open every summer; Wellington Channel, and other more narrow channels leading towards the northwest, through the Parry islands, were entirely free from ice both earlier and later in the season than the time when this supposed strait was impenetrable. On the other hand, in sailing up Prince Regent's Inlet, a bay with but one outlet, as is now known, he was met by the same obstacles as in approaching this supposed strait. Moreover, if this were really nothing but a frozen strait, connecting two oceans, we should expect to find tides of some force flowing under the ice to where Parry was. Yet, in fact, he speaks with some hesitation of the existence of any tide there in summer, with entire doubt as to its direction; and, indeed, shows with abundant clearness that the currents were at the

mercy of the winds. In connection with this, we may add, the bones of deer, and musk oxen, and the quantity of their dung found on Melville island, so called, show that it is a place of constant resort for these animals; while the fact that they come to it from the southwest seems to indicate that they are acquainted with the permanency of its connection with Banks's Land.

Now, what is the nature of this permanent connection,—this isthmus, in fact,—which resists alike the influence of tempests, of currents, and of the unremitting heat of an arctic summer? That it should be merely the frozen surface of a strait, from fifteen to eighteen leagues wide, connecting two oceans, is improbable in the extreme. Nothing but the strongest evidence should be admitted as proving it. Yet no one, so far as is known, has travelled upon it, to ascertain its nature, and the only pretence upon which it is called a frozen strait is, that Parry, when nearest Cape Dundas, thought there was no land in sight encompassing the western horizon. Nevertheless, he does say, (Narrative, p. 250,) "The ice, to the west and southwest, was as solid and compact, to all appearance, as so much land, to which, indeed, the surface of many of the fields, from the kind of hill and dale I have before endeavored to describe, bore no imperfect resemblance." Now, the difficulty of distinguishing low land from ice, in the polar region, is well known. Parry, himself, puts this note, in the chart of his discoveries, near Prince Regent's Inlet: "N. B. Several of the valleys on this coast resemble bays, at a few miles distance." On page 72, of his Narrative, he says: —

"We afterwards found, however, that we had, at this time, been actually within three or four hundred yards of Cape Hearne. The error into which we were here led, as to our distance from the beach, arose from the extreme difficulty of distinguishing, even in broad daylight, between ice and land, when the latter is low and shelving, and completely covered with snow; by the uniform whiteness of which they are so completely blended as to deceive the best eye. Indeed, I know of no circumstance, in the navigation of these seas, which renders more necessary a vigilant look-out, and a careful attention to the hand-leads, than the deception to which I allude."

We find a similar instance on page 263.

“ We had occasion here to notice, in a very striking degree, the deception occasioned by snow lying upon the land, in judging of its distance ; this, indeed, is much more remarkable in these seas than in any other, when any part of the intermediate space is occupied by floes of ice, the whiteness of which mingles so imperceptibly with that of the snow upon the land, that it is impossible, from the total absence of any shadow, to tell where one ends and the other commences. Such, indeed, was the illusion this evening, with respect to Garrett island, which was completely covered with snow, that, although we were sailing at the distance of only four or five miles from it, we should scarcely have been aware that any land was in that direction, had we not previously surveyed these islands, and been running with the chart before us.”

We give one more instance. When he reached Point Nias, on his land journey to the northern side of Melville island, so called, he was doubtful whether the snowy plain, which spread before him, was the land or the sea. At length, “ we came to some ice thrown up on the beach, having cracks in it parallel to the line of the shore, which we immediately recognized to be of the same kind as those to which we had been long accustomed in Winter harbor, and which are occasioned by the rise and fall of the tide. Such, however, was the sameness in the appearance of the sea and of the low shelving shore interposed for two or three miles between it and the hill we had descended in the morning, that, had it not been for the circumstance I have just mentioned, we should still have been in great doubt respecting the nature of the level surface to the northward.” Not being entirely satisfied yet, he made his men bore through the ice, which was very hard, and fourteen feet thick. In three quarters of an hour, the aperture was nearly filled with water. Every one tasted it. Though it was not very salt, Parry says it was saltish, enough so to convince every one that they were really standing upon the sea. But, from another source, we learn that not every one was convinced ; for Captain (now Colonel) Sabine, the most accomplished member of the party, says, in a note to his preface to Von Wrangell, “ The party, of which I myself was one, who walked from the south to the north side of Melville island, in May, 1820, *did not go off the land on the north side.*” Here we see two intelligent men differing in opinion, not

only as to whether that was land which lay a few miles before them, but whether it was sea or land upon which they were actually standing.

These examples are enough to show that Sir Edward Parry could not possibly determine, by merely gazing at the fields of ice which lay extended before him, that it was all a frozen sea between him and the horizon. Particularly in this instance he could not, when he says that the white expanse had much of the appearance of land. On the contrary, the entire experience of two seasons goes directly to show that there was land between Melville island and Banks's Land, if not in sight, at least, beyond the horizon. We may, therefore, fairly and confidently infer, that "the something peculiar about the southwestern extremity of Melville island, extremely unfavorable to navigation," is an isthmus connecting it with Banks's Land. Consequently, a passage to the Polar Sea is impossible in that direction.

Approach to the Polar Sea in this quarter being barred by this isthmus, all access to it through Barrow's Strait is cut off, unless a passage can be found in the channels which lie towards the northwest, between the Parry islands. Here we are left to speculation, as no explorer has entered them to tell where they lead; we can only reason on the facts which Parry noted when he sailed by them. Both times he remarked that they were perfectly open. A barrier of loose ice extended across Barrow's Strait, through which he pushed his vessels with difficulty; along the south lay an impenetrable field of ice, extending as far as he advanced; to the west of these straits, he hardly found room to navigate his vessels. Yet these straits, all the while, were unconscious of winter. Parry says of Wellington Channel, in particular, that as far as could be seen from the mast head, it was as free from ice as the middle of the Atlantic. From some of his other observations, it appears that a current flows constantly through them from the northwest. As Wellington Channel alone is sixty miles wide, it is obvious that such a current can be supplied only by a very large body of water. But let the body of water be as large as it may, it could not supply a constant current of this magnitude, unless it in return received a current from the ocean. Hence the straits flowing through the group of the Parry islands must, in some manner, connect with an ocean.

For aught we know, they may turn to the northeast, and join the Atlantic to the northeast of Greenland; but there are circumstances which make the supposition more probable, that they flow from an ocean spreading to the west and northwest of the Parry group. One very little circumstance shows that there is a sea there. We read, in the account of the land journey to the northern shore of Melville island, (Narrative, p. 192,) "the whole of the shore, as far as I could see with a glass to the westward of Point Nias, bore evident marks of that tremendous pressure which is produced by fields of ice set in motion." The effect of the westerly winds is a more striking fact. In many places in the narrative, Parry remarks, that while he was on the southern shore of Melville island, westerly winds drove the heavy masses of ice towards the west. In September, 1819, he noticed for nearly a week this remarkable spectacle of heavy masses of ice drifting directly in the teeth of the wind, at the same time that the smaller fragments flowed with the superficial current, which always is in the same direction with the wind. As stated in the narrative, this appears to be an inexplicable anomaly. But if we suppose Wellington Channel and the other channels to flow from a sea lying to the northwest of the Parry islands, it becomes very simple. For when westerly winds impel its waters through these channels faster than they can flow through Barrow's Strait, the backwater must flow to the west along the shore of Melville island, carrying the heavy ice with it, in the teeth of the wind.

Thus a careful examination of Sir Edward Parry's Narrative of his first voyage shows, that no passage to the Polar Sea can be found where he sought it, and where Franklin was sent to find it; while it probably may be found through Wellington Channel, where Franklin was permitted to look for it as a last resort. But the navigator has by no means solved the problem of the Northwest Passage when he has reached the Polar Sea. He has then only penetrated to a region which is utterly unknown, even unimagined. What may be the limits of that sea, what currents may there perplex the voyager, what obstacles may oppose him, or whether an open sea may lie before him, we cannot even guess. Supposing so much to be accomplished, we turn to the other end of the supposed Passage, where it joins the Pacific.

The contemporaneous discoveries of Franklin, and of Mr. Elson under the command of Captain Beechey, left only that part of the northern boundary of North America which lies between Point Beechey, in longitude 150° W., and Point Barrow, 157° W., to be discovered. Messrs. Dease and Simpson having traversed this in 1836, the coast is now delineated on all the maps from the Pacific to the Mackenzie and Coppermine rivers. But the determination of the northern boundary of the continent is a very different thing from the discovery of a navigable Northwest Passage. It is very interesting undoubtedly ; but it is only a modern off-shoot from the old problem which the navigators of Great Britain have been trying to solve ever since the days of Frobisher. On the maps, however, so much of the Passage as lies between the Pacific and the Polar Sea appears to have been accomplished. The coast is distinctly drawn, the sea appears to be unobstructed, and it looks like the simplest thing in the world to navigate a vessel from Behring's Strait to the Mackenzie river. But the illusion is quickly dispelled by a glance at the narratives of the discoverers.

A ship might, indeed, under favorable circumstances, sail without much difficulty from the Pacific to Point Barrow. Mr. Elson and Lieutenant Smyth, when despatched by Captain Beechey, in the Blossom's barge, to trace the coast beyond Icy Cape, found an open channel, though not a very broad or deep one, between the shore and the fixed ice in the offing, extending to the Point. On their return, a change of the wind drove the heavy ice near the shore, and filled up the channel with fragments. The boat was so jammed against the land, that after many efforts to extricate it, Elson was about to abandon it and rejoin Captain Beechey by land, when a fortunate change of wind relieved him. The passage from the Pacific, as far as Point Barrow, is therefore practicable, although it is precarious. On weathering the Point, we come to a different region. Every vestige of cheerfulness disappears, and a dreary expanse presents itself. On one side, lies the ocean, a vast plain of ice ; on the other, is a continent of frozen mud. The chilly fog which prevails there, is welcomed as a veil to hide the scene ; but the voyager often longs to behold its bleakness again before the fog is dispelled. Simpson, in the journal of his approach to

Point Barrow from the east, gives a vivid picture of this solitude. As he dragged his light boat through and over the ice, he seemed to have advanced beyond that part of the world which is intended to support life. Two families of Esquimaux were the only human beings he saw ; the deer, the only other living things, were hurrying to a more hospitable region ; and the only sound that disturbed the universal stillness was the grinding of the broken ice. We take a few notes from his journal to show that no ship can be navigated there, and that those who seek a Northwest Passage must look in some other quarter for it.

“ 20th of July. The ice became heavier as we advanced ; and at one, P. M., it entirely arrested our progress in Foggy Island Bay. 21st. The storm raged fiercely, but we bore with patience the detention on witnessing the havoc made among the landward ice. A few miles out to sea, a continuous white line proclaimed it still unbroken. 22d. We stood out under close reefed topsails for Point Anxiety. When we found we had neared it by our reckoning, we found ourselves barred from the land by a broad stream of heavy ice, extending out to seaward. 23d. We once more set sail for Point Anxiety. The ice again prevented our approaching it, and left us far to seaward. 24th. The wind now veered to the northward, driving the ice down upon us. We made the shore at midnight. It was with difficulty we found a landing place on a large fragment of ice upon which the boats were hauled up. 25th. The coast line is formed of frozen mud banks. 26th. From Cape Halket, the coast for fifteen miles presents nought to the eye but a succession of low banks of frozen mud. The ice was very heavy all along this part of the coast, and but very recently detached from the beach. 27th. The earth was impenetrably frozen at the depth of four inches, so that our tent pegs could not be driven home. About noon, we observed with pleasure the ice beginning to open, and at two, we discovered a narrow lane of water, leading out from the land, and apparently turning again inwards a few miles farther on. We made our way amongst the ice with considerable risk. Farther out in the bay, the ice lay smooth and solid as in the depth of a sunless winter. So unbroken was its appearance, that some of the party longed for carioles to drive at once to Point Barrow. 28th. High water widened the narrow passage between the ice-bergs and the shore, and enabled us to double the cape ; but we had only proceeded two or three miles, when our further progress was arrested by an impenetrable body of ice, extending, as we found in the course of the day, all along the coast. The ice

appearing somewhat loosened on the morning of the 31st, we embarked at nine o'clock, and forced our way through the crowded masses for about two miles, with serious risk to the boats. In this sort of progress, to which we frequently had recourse, it must be understood that, except the bowmen and steersmen, all the crew were out upon the ice with poles, pushing aside and fending off the successive fragments. The advance thus effected was always slow, painful, and precarious; and we considered ourselves particularly fortunate whenever we found a natural channel through the ice, wide enough to admit our little boats. The farther advance of our boats appeared hopeless. In four days, we had only made good as many miles. I therefore lost no time in imparting to Mr. Dease my desire of exploring the rest of the coast to Point Barrow on foot. Aug. 2d. The coast [the west shore of Dease Inlet] was frozen solidly within two inches of the surface. 3d. We found the ice close jammed along the shore. We found to our surprise the muddy bottom was impenetrably frozen. We had not gone far when we came to a compact body of ice, extending beyond the reach of vision. Carrying our light vessel [a canoe bought from the Esquimaux women at Dease Inlet,] across a corner of this barrier, we pursued our way through the little channels between it and the shore. 4th. We had now only to cross Elson Bay. It was covered with a tough coat of young ice, through which we broke a passage. On reaching the shore [of Point Barrow] and seeing the ocean spreading far and wide to the southwest, we unfurled our flag, and, with three enthusiastic cheers, took possession of our discoveries in his Majesty's name. To the northward, a multitude of icebergs covered the ocean; in the east, nothing but ice was visible; but on the western side, a broad lane of water stretched away towards Cape Smyth."

To look for a navigable passage along this coast is evidently preposterous. If there really be a Northwest Passage, we must look for its western termination elsewhere. From Lieutenant Smyth's report to Captain Beechey (in Part I. of Beechey's Narrative,) it seems possible that it may be found joining the coast at Point Barrow. For Mr. Elson and Lieutenant Smyth not only saw a channel of clear water running through the ice towards the north from the Point, but they also observed a strong current there setting towards the north, which continued at least half a day after the south wind fell. For aught that Lieutenant Smyth says in his report, it may be a constant current. But Captain Beechey, after a thorough examination of the sea to the north of

Behring's Strait, came to the conclusion that there is a slight current flowing to the north through the strait; but that it turns to the northwest at Cape Lisburn, and that there is no fixed current farther up the American coast than Icy Cape. He says farther, (Part II. p. 579,) "By many experiments made on shore at Icy Cape by Lieutenant Belcher, it appeared, that southerly and westerly winds occasioned high tides, and northerly and easterly winds very low ebbs. It would seem, therefore, from this fact, that the water finds some obstruction to the northward." From this deliberate opinion of Captain Beechey (and no one is more capable of forming a just one upon the matter) it follows, that the channel running towards the north through the ice at Point Barrow is of limited extent, and, therefore, does not communicate with the ocean to the north. The same conclusion is suggested by the glimpses, which we get from the narratives of Captain Beechey and Mr. Simpson, of the immensity of ice which bounds the northern horizon in all that region.

If this opening be abandoned, the resolute explorer has but one other course to take. Instead of creeping along the coast, edging between the land and the ice, he must stand boldly out into the sea which spreads to the north of Behring's Strait. But even here an obstacle awaits him. The fixed ice which approaches within a mile or two of the shore at Point Barrow, and recedes gradually from it down to about the 70th parallel of latitude, stretches nearly west on that parallel, presenting, as far as it extends, an impenetrable barrier to navigation. We do not know how far it extends; but we know that Captain Beechey found it balking him as far west as he went, both the years that he approached it. But suppose its western limit were ascertained, all difficulty would not yet be removed, by any means. The two facts, that a constant though gentle current, setting against it from the south, does not remove it, and that the water along it, hundreds of miles from any land that is known, is shallow, suggest the idea that it may be sustained by resting against undiscovered land to the north. Captain Beechey says, "it may lie off the coast of some polar lands, too low and too far off to be seen from the margin of the ice, and which can be ascertained only by journeys over the ice, in a similar manner to that in which the mountains to the north of Skelatskoi Noss

were discovered by the Russians. The indications, therefore, are, that if the western limit of this icy barrier should be reached, still the western boundary of land lying behind it would be found to extend indefinitely to the north. But it is idle to speculate upon the unknown extent and direction of a supposed coast, beginning at an unknown point. It is not idle, however, to bear in mind that all this is unknown ; for it shows that nothing whatever is known of the western termination of the much desired Passage. If, therefore, as we supposed, a bold explorer should sail through Wellington Channel to some yet unknown sea (as we think Franklin has,) he would find the task of discovering the Northwest Passage only begun ; he would find

“The world was all before him, where to choose.”

In a word, the result of all the discoveries that have been made, is simply this : — if there really be a navigable Northwest Passage, Wellington Channel and Barrow’s Strait probably form its eastern end ; the western end is probably somewhere to the north or northwest of Behring’s Strait, and the rest of it is utterly unknown. Meagre and vague as this is, we doubt very much if the combined explorations of all the expeditions, which have been sent to the relief of Sir John Franklin, will make it much more definite.

But if the expeditions cannot discover the long sought for Northwest Passage, they may determine many doubtful points in regard to the Northern boundary of America. On one point, we shall be glad to hear their report. The maps made since 1836 have, on the faith of Mr. Simpson’s book, represented the coast-line as continuous around Point Barrow to Gwydyr Bay, to which Sir John Franklin had traced it before, from the east. If Simpson could be implicitly trusted, there would scarcely be room for doubting their correctness. But when we turn from the grave quartos of the Government expeditions to his sprightly octavo, we meet with omissions, slight inconsistencies, and sometimes a dramatic style, that create a distrust which no one can feel with regard to Beechey, or Parry, or Franklin, or Ross. Hence, the fact of his describing the coast-line from Gwydyr Bay to Point Barrow is not, of itself, conclusive that such a coast-line has been traced ; we are not barred from examining his narrative, to

see how far his particular observations sustain him. When we compare his narrative with Beechey's and Franklin's, we are struck with the singular contrast which the coast that he explored (from Gwydyr Bay to Point Barrow) presents with the coast on each side of it. To the southwest of Point Barrow, and to the east, beyond Mackenzie river, the shores are populous with Esquimaux; numerous whales and seals disport in the water, and many a clumsy walrus is seen basking himself on the ice. But on this part, included between them, neither Esquimaux, nor whales, nor seals, nor walruses are to be found. Although several large rivers discharge their waters there, among them the Colville, which produces an impetuous current six miles from the shore, and makes the water fresh for twenty miles around its mouth, Simpson found the ice, in August, firmly fastened to the shore, or recently detached from it, filling the northern horizon, and lying as "smooth and solid as in the depth of a sunless winter." Near Point Barrow, he came to "a compact body of ice extending beyond the reach of vision," resting upon the land, over which he had to carry his boat both going and returning. This compact body of ice was just where Mr. Elson and Lieutenant Smyth had observed it, from the west side of Point Barrow, nine years before. Great numbers of deer collect near this tongue of ice, just as they do in their migrations all over the Polar region, near tongues of land connecting large tracts of country that are almost dissevered by water. These facts, of themselves, suggest the possibility that this "compact body of ice" is an isthmus, like the low isthmus, a mile wide, which Rae has discovered crossing the supposed strait marked on the maps "Dease and Simpson's Strait," and that it may join a great tract of land to the north, the existence of which is suggested by Captain Beechey and indicated by all the discoveries in that quarter. When Simpson asked the Esquimaux woman, at Dease Inlet, to draw for him a map of the coast, she drew one terminating at the west "in a considerable bay;" the old man then added, farther to the west, a cape, which meant Point Barrow. The only bay that Simpson found, to the west of Dease Inlet, was a semicircular indentation in the coast four miles in diameter. To call this a considerable bay is ridiculous. Dease Inlet was five miles wide where they were

drawing the map, ten miles from its mouth. If, however, the woman considered the tongue of compact ice, over which Simpson had to carry his boat, as an isthmus, then she might well terminate her map, at the west, with a considerable bay.

In connection with this, we cannot but notice Simpson's conduct when he reached Point Barrow. When he landed, he was half way between its extremity and its junction with the main land. He had struggled through disheartening difficulties to reach the northern extremity of America, and three enthusiastic cheers broke spontaneously from his party as they touched the soil. But when we expect to see them rush to the extremity of the point, to reach the desired goal, Simpson stops to consider. In the morning, which he describes as gloriously clear, he could see very well that the village a mile and a half to the south was inhabited ; but at the same time, he could not tell, "in the mist of the morning," whether the one a mile and a half to the north was inhabited or not. Immediately forgetting his longing to stand on the northern extremity of the continent, he turns to the southern village to enjoy the pleasure of a conversation with a people of whose language he knew absolutely nothing, save what he could gather from the meagre vocabulary of another dialect which he carried with him. He intimates, afterwards, that he was afraid of the Esquimaux of the northern village. Yet he remained on the point twelve hours, with the inhabitants of both villages gathered around his little party ; and, shunning the higher land at the northern end, he walked, alone, to the low western shore, to obtain an extensive prospect. The whole account of his expedition to Point Barrow, from Boat Extreme where he left Mr. Dease and half the party, is tinged with obscurity. We are not prepared to say that his representations are not correct ; but we should not be surprised to learn that Commander Moore has found that they are not.

Thus, it appears that the success of the combined expeditions, which have been sent out by the British Government, will be different in their various objects. As to the first, the succor of Sir John Franklin, little can be said, save that while there is doubt there is hope. In the second, the tracing of the northern coast of America, much will undoubtedly be accomplished. But in the third, the discovery of the North-

west Passage, little will be done, we are confident, but to show the fallacy of the hopes of the late Sir John Barrow. The British navy may well be proud of the boldness, perseverance, and fortitude which have been displayed in the baffled search for this coy strait. Yet, after three centuries of exploration, the language used to urge its prosecution remains unchanged. In the year 1576, after Frobisher's return, Sir Humphrey Gilbert said, in his Discourse to prove a passage by the Northwest to Cathaia and the East Indies, "America is discovered so farre, towards the north, as Cape Fredo, which is at 62 degrees, and that part of Grondland next adjoyning is knownen to stand at but 72 degrees. So that we have but 10 degrees to saile north and south to put the world out of doubt hereof." In 1844, Sir John Barrow wrote, "Only nine hundred miles remain to be explored. If expense be the only objection, it may be met by observing that one season only would suffice for its decision." Sir Humphrey Gilbert perished in the fruitless expedition that his discourse excited; and the expedition which Sir John Barrow's argument elicited has been for four years—Heaven only knows where. Such long-continued want of success warrants us in doubting the existence of the Northwest Passage; until it shall be actually discovered, we may fairly hold it to be a phantom

"Which, like the circle bounding earth and skies,
Still lures us on, and, as we follow, flies."

ART. II.—*Histoire de la Sicile sous la Domination des Normands.* Par le BARON DE BAZANCOURT. Paris : 1846. 2 vols. 8vo.

IN the year 1016, a bark proceeding from Amalfi was seen to enter the port of Salerno. The pilgrim cloaks of those who manned it, the long beards which descended on their breasts, and the purses which were fastened to their girdles, showed that they had just returned from the Holy Land. Many were the pilgrims who at that period resorted to Palestine to obtain, at the tomb of the Saviour, the forgiveness of their sins. The minds of men were then filled